Check List
the journal of biodiversity data

EDITORIAL

Check List 11(4): 1680, 18 June 2015 doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.15560/11.4.1680
ISSN 1809-127X © 2015 Check List and Authors

Editorial: Wherefore and whither a *Check List*? The journal at the age of 10

Diogo Borges Provete

Göteborgs Universitet, Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Göteborg, SE-40530, Sweden
E-mail: dbprovete@gmail.com

Introduction

Biodiversity data refers to the set of information that includes species inventories, ecological interactions, behavior, images and sounds, data sets descriptions, analyses and interpretations (Costello et al. 2013). This kind of data is essential to support not only conservation strategies, but also basic ecological research. For example, georeferenced data of species distribution can be used to prepare red lists, spatial conservation planning, niche modeling, and biogeographic and macroecological studies. Those latter fields are limited by data availability, especially in tropical areas, which are biologically rich, but usually not well surveyed.

The importance of basic data about species distribution has been increasingly acknowledged in the literature. Many journals now publish data sets of species lists, the so-called Data papers, usually in the online-only format. The relevance of basic natural history information has been also increasingly emphasized (e.g., Futuyma 1998; Ricklefs 2012) and now no one doubts that natural history data should be collected, curated, and published. One of the most basic information of a place is which species occur there. Species inventories are also the first step taken in environmental assessments. Furthermore, in developing, megadiverse countries, publishing species lists may be the only way to make available species records of small museums which are usually not fully digitized.

Historical background and current status of the journal

Check List was founded in 2005 by Luís Felipe Toledo (now professor at Unicamp, Brazil) to fulfill a gap in scientific publishing of new species records and complete species list, which were not accepted by most journals at the time (see discussion in Cotterill and Foissners 2010). As such, *Check List* was one of the first journals fully dedicated to biodiversity data publishing. The journal is now established as a major, internationally recognized venue for the dissemination of that kind of data. Ultimately, *Check List*'s mission is to increase our knowledge of how life is distributed on the Earth and decrease the so-called Wallacean shortfall (Lomolino 2004). Our author's instructions are in line with the recent guidelines for publishing biodiversity data (e.g., Cadman et al. 2011; Costello and Wieczorek 2014), which include citing voucher specimens, species authority, and who has identified the species.

The workflow of the journal is as follows: after a manuscript is received, it is assigned by the editor-in-chief to a subject editor based on criteria that include geographical area of expertise, taxon, and availability. After that, the subject editor makes a first quality check to see if the manuscript conforms to the scope of the journal, English language quality, and adherence to formatting rules. If the manuscript passes this first step, the editor invites at least one (in the case of Notes of Geographic Distribution) or two (in the case of Species List) outside reviewers. After the reviewing and revising phases, if the manuscript is accepted, it goes to the graphic editor, who is in charge of the copyediting, layout, and proof preparation. After acceptance of proof by author, the manuscript goes online and a DOI is assigned to it.

Check List is a journal maintained by the volunteer work of many people. Our editorial board currently has 67 subject editors from 18 countries, divided into 14 sections, whose taxonomic groups they are specialized, namely: Amphibians and Reptiles, Mammals, Fish, Aves, Spermatophyta, Orchids, Pteridophytes, Insects, Terrestrial arthropods, Aquatic invertebrates, Molluscs, Helminths, Fungi, and Algae. We also count with six graphic editors who are responsible for the graphic layout, copyediting, DOI registering, and publishing itself. As the editor-in-chief, I try to promote gender equality as much as I can, trying to balance the number of men and women in the editorial board. Currently, we have 17 women as subject editors, which comprise about 26% of the editorial board, but I really hope this figure to improve in the near future. The same is true for the

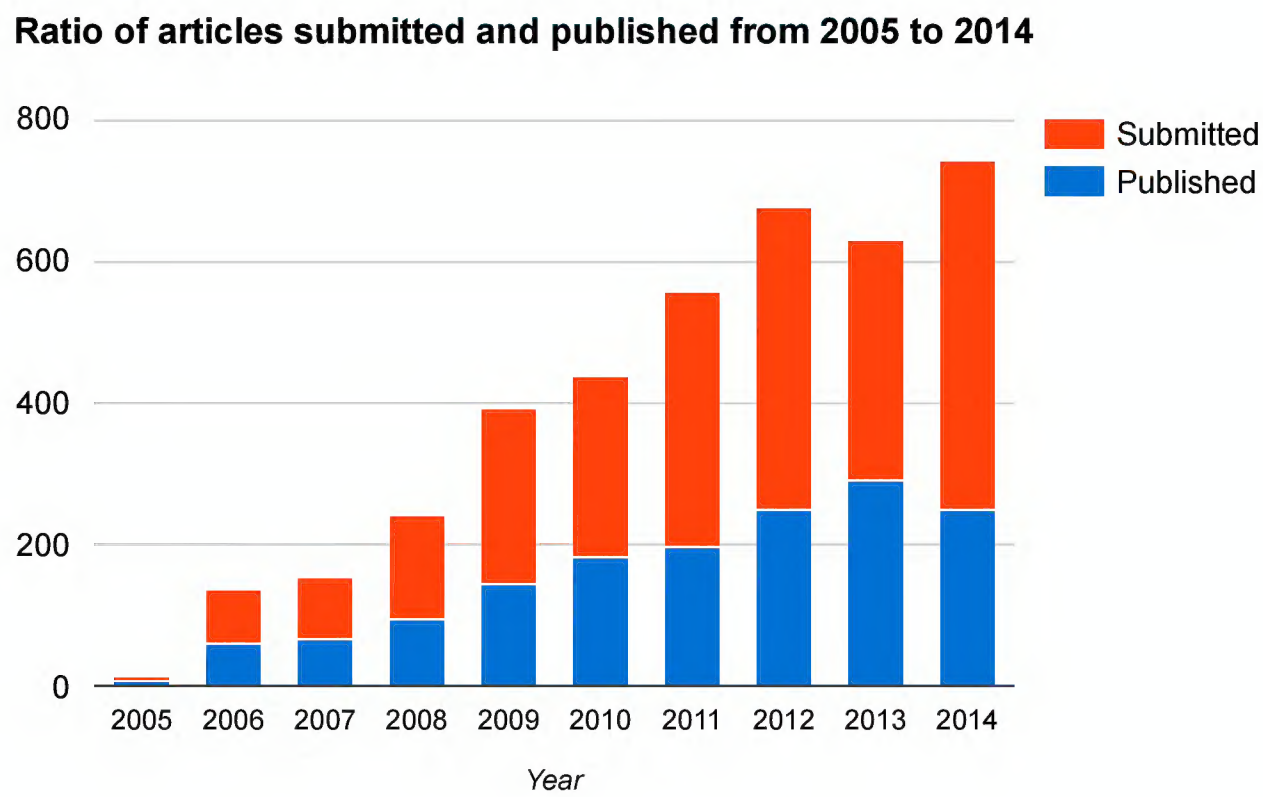

Figure 1. Ratio of articles published and submitted from 2005 to 2014. Each bar represents one year.

country of origin of the subject editors, since 48% of the subject editors are Brazilians.

This year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the journal and this editorial, the first in the journal history, is to present not only the history but also the recent achievements and perspectives. As the time of my writing, we have already published 1,674 articles and started the fourth issue of the volume 11. Throughout the years, the mean of papers published per year was about 160, with up to 253 papers submitted per year in mean. The submissions increased considerably in 2011, when we received more than 360 papers in the same year. This was the first time we received more than 250 submissions. In the subsequent year, the submissions increased by 18% and we received 428 submissions, which is still a record so far (Figure. 1). The mean rejection rate pooling all the data from 2005 to 2014 is 30%, which seems not too low for taxonomic and surely not ecological journals. But on the other hand, it emphasizes that our mission is to make biodiversity data available, open, and freely. We do not have any kind of quota for rejections, as commonly practiced in other journals. The choice of making *Check List* online only definitely makes easy publishing as many relevant papers as possible.

Perhaps not coincidently, the steady increase in submission started two years after the journal became indexed in Scopus database (SJR: SCImago Journal and Country Record). The journal's profile in Scopus shows that from 2011 to 2013, about 19% of the papers we publish had authors of more than one country, making *Check List* an internationally recognized journal. The amount of self-citations is also decreasing every year. This is a good sign, showing that we do not encourage authors to only cite papers we publish. All this information can be seen in the Scopus webpage.

Recent changes

Beginning in 2014, *Check List* has joined Biotaxa portal (http://biotaxa.org/index/about), which is a consortium of publishers that uses the Online Journal System (Muir and Wilinsky 2005) as a submission and publishing platform. The website was created by Zhi-Quiang Zhang, the editor-in-chief and founder of Zootaxa. The portal is intended to support small publishers and now hosts as many as 30 journals. The new system has greatly improved our ability to meet authors' demands, since the time of first decision is now about 40 days and 52 days from submission to publication. The membership in Biotaxa perhaps opened up a new phase in the journal history, making it more professional and provided authors with an easy way to submit and keep track of manuscripts throughout the editorial process. The time from acceptance to publication was also strongly reduced by the adoption of a continuous publishing system, with papers being online just after acceptance, without waiting to be assigned to upcoming issues.

As another major recent change, an author fee of US$20.00 was introduced in 2014 to cover the costs associated with the new portal, layout production, and the DOI. At the end of that year, *Check List* joined the *Associação Brasileira de Editores Científicos* (ABEC) as a journal member. Besides improving the recognition of our work, the membership also allowed us to take part in the ABEC-CrossRef agreement, which exempted us from paying the CrossRef annual fee to register the DOI of papers, allowing the allocation of funds to other areas.

Since we moved to the new portal, we have been slowly uploading previous volumes. Now, I am glad to announce that volumes 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, and 11 are fully or partially available on our new website with their respective DOIs assigned. Additionally, besides Notes on Geographic Distribution (publication of new data on

one or a few species) and Lists of Species (biodiversity surveys), beginning this year we will have a new section called Forum. This new section will publish short, opinion papers about hot or controversial subjects in biodiversity data and biogeography. Depending on the subject, other invited author(s) could write a reply to the original paper, with a rejoinder at the end. We hope this initiative will foster discussion of the most important aspects of biodiversity science in a timely manner. Additionally, beginning this year, we have published our first two book reviews that are already available in our website. Be sure to check our new guidelines if you want to submit a paper to these new sections.

Perspectives

In the beginning of 2015, we have created an online survey to ask people their opinions about the recent changes in the journal. So far, 23 people have answered it. Only 21% thought that the DOI was not important and not worth paying for, with 67% stating that the fee was not expensive. The results illustrate that we took a right decision to charge a small fee to authors to cover publication costs. But more importantly, the fee itself did not undermine the interest of authors or decreased submission rate.

The journal has also recently been accepted as a Data Publisher in the GBIF portal (http://www.gbif.org/publisher/03433ccd-5166-4730-94a9-e06ec25d1a72), only pending an endorsement from the Brazilian node to start submitting records. In our survey mentioned above, this initiative was seen as positive by more than 80% of the respondents. To implement this change, a new platform, called Integrated Publishing Toolkit, would be required for authors to submit their data in the Darwin Core standard (Wieczorek et al. 2012). After the implementation, every distribution record published in our pages would be made available in an open, retrievable form to everyone at GBIF.

As another the initiative to improve the visibility of the journal, we now have a Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/checklistjournal) with 1,200+ likes. I invite all readers to join us there to receive our last news and announcements. I hope *Check List* will continue in the right path helping to decrease the Wallacean shortfall and spread the knowledge about how life is distributed on Earth. I would like to invite you to submit your next manuscript to us as new enhancements are on their way. Thank you for your continuous support!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all Subject and Graphic Editors, current and past, who have selflessly donated their time to *Check List*. The status of the journal today is surely a consequence of your dedicated work. But also the past editors-in-chief: Luís Felipe Toledo, Daniel Loebmann, Leandro Bugoni, and Henrique C. Costa. The Centro de Referência em Informação Ambiental (CRIA) worked along with us for all these years, and without their support the journal would not have reached the level of quality it has today. We really appreciate their help. I was supported by a CNPq post-doctoral fellowship while writing this manuscript (#203734/2014-9).

LITERATURE CITED

Cadman, M., V. Chavan, N. King, S. Willoughby, A. Rajvanshi, V.B. Mathur, R. Roberts and T. Hirsch. 2011. Improving EIA practice: best practice guide for publishing primary biodiversity data. 50. Global Biodiversity Information Facility, Copenhagen.

Costello, M.J. and J. Wieczorek. 2014. Best practice for biodiversity data management and publication. Biological Conservation 173: 68–73. doi: 10.1016/j.biocon.2013.10.018

Cotterill, F.P. and W. Foissner. 2010. A pervasive denigration of natural history misconstrues how biodiversity inventories and taxonomy underpin scientific knowledge. Biodiversity and Conservation 19: 291–303. doi: 10.1007/s10531-009-9721-4

Futuyma, D.J. 1998. Wherefore and whither the naturalist? American Naturalist 151: 1–6. doi: 10.1086/286097

Lomolino, M.V. 2004. Conservation biogeography; pp. 293–296, in: M.V. Lomolino and L.R. Heaney (eds.). Frontiers of biogeography: new directions in the geography of nature. Sunderland: Sinauer Associates.

Muir, S.P. and J. Willinsky. 2005. Open Journal Systems. Library Hi Tech 23: 504–519. doi: 10.1108/07378830510636300

Ricklefs, R.E. 2012. Naturalists, natural history, and the nature of biological diversity. American Naturalist 179: 423–435. doi: 10.1086/664622

Wieczorek, J., D. Bloom, R. Guralnick, S. Blum, M. Doring, R. Giovanni, T. Robertson and D. Vieglais. 2012. Darwin Core: an evolving community-developed biodiversity data standard. PLOS ONE 7(1): e29715. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0029715